



## Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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### House 5740

### The Health, Education & Welfare Committee

### State House

March 2, 2005

My name is Steven A. Florio and I am the Executive Director of Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This commission is known as a one-stop center on all Deaf and Hard of Hearing matters. We deal with all deaf and hard of hearing individuals' needs every day whether they need resources, referrals, and training. That includes ensuring that the intervention programs are appropriately nurturing the deaf and hard of hearing infants' and toddlers' developmental needs.

On behalf of the RI CDHH, we support this bill because this bill is necessary to update the state laws that are consistent with the federal government's Individual with Disability Education Act (IDEA).

However, the list of suggested members to serve on the commission troubles me. I do not see any representative that has knowledge and experience on programs and services that are beneficial for the deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers.

The IDEA, whether it is Section 619, Part B, or Part C, does apply to the deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers. The language development is very critical in the deaf and hard of hearing infants/toddlers because it does require specialized professionals to train parents and to teach infants/toddlers in the least restrictive environment. Today, 13 early intervention programs DO NOT have appropriate professionals to consult parents and to evaluate toddlers who are deaf and hard of hearing. A high percentage of deaf and hard of hearing children enter a 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom with severe language delays that would not allow them to be prepared for the academic needs of the first grade.

It is in the utmost interest of deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers that a representative with depth knowledge and expertise on deafness shall serve on the commission. Therefore, RI CDHH requests that a representative from RI CDHH to serve on the commission.

In conclusion, on behalf of the RI CDHH, we support this bill with the recommended amendment.

I strongly encourage you to take serious consideration on this matter. For some reason, if more research is needed on this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me for more resources that would help you to make a better decision. I can be reached by e-mail, [SFLORIO@CDHH.RI.GOV](mailto:SFLORIO@CDHH.RI.GOV).

Honorably Submitted by:

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